

longer have produced a work of art had he tried. That theory is wrong, based on ignorance of what was then in Zola's mind. If he had lived long enough to write the novel on the " *Le roman expérimental*,"¹ of which he talked so often to the present writer, the world would have seen that the powers of the novelist were undiminished. But in the great crisis through which France was passing Zola held that for a time, at all events, his duty lay in other work.

" *Le roman expérimental*," of which some mention was made in the previous chapter, treated a subject which had long haunted him — in a measure for personal reasons — but it was, of course, from the national standpoint that he dealt with it in his book. The question of the decline in the birth rate and the mortality among infants had not only occupied the attention of French sociologists and scientists for several years, but various novels based upon it had already been written — novels indicating that the whole tendency of the times was to transform matrimony into legalised prostitution, in accordance with certain specious neo-Malthusian theories. Zola rightly held that unless that tendency were checked there could be no social regeneration at all. Thus he placed the subject in question at the head of his series. While he was preparing " *Le roman expérimental* " in England the present writer was often, able to glance at the

documents,, 'medical works, reports, letters
from eminent
MiontistH, and ao forth, on which the novelist
based his
account of the noxious practices prevalent in
various strata
of French society, and he holds that far from "
E^conditt*"
btung an exaggerated picture it did not
represent more than
two-tlurdB of the actual truth. On the other
hand, when
Zola proceeded to sketch the healthy life
which ought to

i See *ante*, p. 430.